

**Psychology Capstone (492)**  
**Personal Well-being and Social Responsibility**  
**Winter 2022**

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 2:15 – 3:15, Thursdays 9:45 – 10:45, or by appointment (all office hours will be held online; please let me know in advance if you would like to attend)

**What is this course about?**

The Capstone course is designed to address research findings in contemporary scientific psychology, to integrate varying perspectives on psychological questions, and potentially to make links between psychological perspectives and other disciplines. Having had several years of a liberal education, and now on the brink of completing your major in psychology, you will have an opportunity to read in selected areas of psychology and to contemplate some of life's "big questions." The skills you've been developing throughout your undergraduate education (e.g., critical thinking, the ability to engage in dialogue, the written expression of your ideas, and the capacity to entertain diverse perspectives) will continue to be honed in this class.

A key underlying question that drives this Capstone seminar is "What does it mean to live well?" Throughout this semester we will be thinking about the importance of personal well-being and social responsibility and how each of these figures in living well. A large and growing literature from the fields of social, personality, health, and positive psychology focusses on personal well-being, its correlates and its outcomes. Recent evidence suggests that the previously accepted notion of the hedonic treadmill may offer an incomplete picture of well-being, and indicates that happiness, in particular, is subject to change. In this course we will be reading and discussing the well-being literature, but we will also consider what might be thought of as the other end of the psychological spectrum: social responsibility. If it is clear that there are advantages to increasing our personal well-being, why should we, as individuals, behave in ways that are meant to benefit others and that could have the effect of reducing our personal well-being? What might motivate us to engage in behaviors that are not obviously self-interested? Are the pursuit of happiness and living "the good life" compatible with a concern for the welfare and well-being of others? An important link between well-being and social responsibility is the issue of values. In this course we will focus on materialism and on the links between the pursuit of material goods, personal well-being, and social responsibility.

I hope that you will find this course intellectually challenging, and I expect you will meet the challenge. I am committed to making this an interesting class that will feed your interest in psychology and that will stimulate all of us to think and to question and, as a group, to have interesting and productive discussions. One of my primary goals in this course is to facilitate the development of intellectual community and our class discussions are the main vehicle for achieving this goal.

## Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for the Capstone are as follows. Upon completion of the course students should be able to:

1. Identify concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline
2. Apply major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the discipline.
3. Describe alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
4. Synthesize where possible alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
5. Recognize various sources of bias in psychological research, and how these can affect the interpretation or usefulness of research findings
6. Analyze interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
7. Explain interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
8. Recognize an appropriate level of professional style writing
9. Produce an appropriate level of professional-style writing

## What will we be doing in this course?

### Reading

Many of the course readings will be posted on Blackboard (BB). You will need to bring **HARD COPIES** of the readings to class. In addition to the reserve readings, **HARD COPIES** of the two following books (which can be purchased inexpensively online) are required:

Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Solnit, R. (2009). *A paradise built in hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster*. Viking Penguin, New York.

Please note that there are some films, videos, and podcasts also included in the syllabus. Throughout the syllabus and the semester, I tend to use the terms “readings” and “course material” interchangeably, in reference to all types of sources for this class.

What you achieve in this course, and what you take from it, will depend heavily on your close reading of the material. Downloading and printing all online readings from BB is necessary and it is strongly recommended that you do this at the beginning of the semester, so you don't run into any difficulties gaining access to materials at the last minute. Having hard copies of readings makes it easy to take notes within each reading and means you will have the same pagination as other people in the class. Because we will be discussing the readings and referring to specific passages, you will need to bring hard copies of the readings to class and you should plan to incorporate references to the readings in your discussion comments (e.g., “In the second paragraph on page 341 the author says something that really helps me understand the importance of this research”).

A reading list for the first and last several weeks of class is available at the end of this syllabus. The reading load for this class is typical for an advanced-level course. You will likely find the reading load to be heaviest during the first few weeks of the semester, especially weeks 2 and 3, so be prepared to devote enough time to read the course material carefully. Course material for the middle of the semester will be chosen by students in the class and will be added to an updated syllabus once all additional materials are submitted by students.

## Engaging in discussion

A key component of this class is group discussion. Discussion fosters deeper understanding of the course material and allows for varying interpretations and perspectives to be entertained. As noted above, this is the main way we work towards a sense of intellectual community. During each class session we will be discussing the assigned reading for that particular class; however, as the semester progresses, we will also be making connections between readings assigned for a given class and those from earlier in the semester. In order to adequately prepare for each class session, you should make sure you have **thoroughly read, viewed, or listened to** the relevant material and that you have **thought carefully** about it. As you read/view, you will find it useful to keep in mind and take notes on questions that help to foster critical thinking, such as the following:

- What kind of source is this? (see *Tips for Reading* on BB)
- What are the points the authors are trying to make?
- What are the authors' underlying assumptions?
- Are their arguments sound?
- What have you already learned about concepts referred to in the reading?
- What theoretical frameworks are the authors relying on?
- What other theoretical frameworks might fruitfully be applied here?
- What is the evidence that is presented?
- What are the implications of the arguments/findings?
- What are your reactions to what you are reading?
- Does the reading raise questions for you? If so, how would you respond to them?
- Are there interesting connections between this reading and past readings?
- Are there inconsistencies across readings? If so, how might you explain them?
- If readings suggest or cause you to entertain particular hypotheses, what kind of studies might be designed to test these hypotheses?

Part of your grade will be based on participation. Our goal as a group will be to engage with each other in meaningful conversations about questions and issues related to well-being, values, and social responsibility. Being in the room is necessary, but **attendance is not sufficient to earn a passing grade**. Higher grades are likely to be achieved by students who consistently participate in our discussions by **making substantive contributions** and **promoting dialogue**, not by those who simply attend without contributing or by those who dominate the discussion. Discussion is a group activity and the more you can do to help foster meaningful discussion about the course material, the higher your participation grade is likely to be. Having a positive impact on discussion involves making your views known, attending to what others are saying, and responding with substantive comments. The goal of our online discussions is to engage in **productive dialogue**. You can find tips about how to do this successfully under Success in This Course on BB (see *Preparing for and Engaging in Class Discussion*).

Being here means being fully present. Since cell phone usage, leaving the room to use your cell phone, texting, etc., pull your attention from the discussion, doing these things will result in your being considered absent. Moreover, frequent engagement in these or other activities (e.g., coming in late, packing up to leave early) that actually detract from class discussion will definitely result in a lower participation grade.

## Facilitating discussion

For the first few weeks of class I will be facilitating discussion on the assigned course material (see Weekly Schedule of Readings and Activities at the end of the syllabus). My intention in Capstone is not to lecture; I may occasionally offer explanations of ideas, but these will be brief and infrequent.

My primary goal is to promote good discussions among students, to challenge you to think deeply about psychological issues and to engage with the material, with me, and with each other. After the first few weeks of the semester, we will switch for several weeks to student-led discussions of the material you choose to assign. At the end of the semester, I will facilitate again for our discussions of Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell*. Because you will be submitting course materials fairly early in the semester, you need to start looking ahead soon at the syllabus to get a good sense of the range of possible topics. Further information regarding your choice of materials and facilitation of discussion is available on BB under Success in This Course. You should see two files: 1) *Information about Choosing Material and Facilitating Discussion* and 2) *Ideas to Stimulate Your Choice of Material*.

## Writing

A third component of this class involves writing. Your writing will take several forms: summaries of the course material, analytical papers, and a final essay. Whatever the form, it is always important to write as clearly and effectively as possible. I will be providing feedback about what you need to work on in your writing throughout the first few weeks of class, but it is up to you to do the necessary work of making improvements. Advice and links to websites that can support you in improving your writing are available on BB under Success in This Course (see *Tips for Writing Successfully*).

**Summaries:** You will be writing brief summaries of all course materials. Each summary should succinctly outline the purpose and key points of the particular source (e.g., empirical article, film). Depending on the source, your summaries will likely range from about half a page to a page each (double-spaced). **These summaries are required.**

The information in your summaries should be **clearly stated in your own words** and should definitely not be copied from a source or its abstract. There is a serious risk in not writing summaries in your own words; if you use wording directly from the sources, and then use material from your summaries as you write your papers, you are likely to commit plagiarism. (See the paragraph on academic integrity and plagiarism under Classroom Policies below.) It is one thing to lose a few points on a summary, but if you plagiarize in a paper, the repercussions are much more serious. Take the time and effort to do your own work. In addition to avoiding plagiarism, that is the best way to learn and understand what you're reading.

In your summaries, you also have the **option** of jotting down notes on your own thinking regarding each source (students typically write a summary and then skip a couple of lines and put notes under a heading of "Notes" or "Thoughts"). These notes could be in a separate file, but I encourage you to keep notes on a particular source in the same file as your summary. Your notes could include your analysis of a researcher's findings, questions that the source raises for you, attempts at addressing your questions, connections between this and earlier sources, etc. They could also include your thoughts about things you found especially interesting or helpful. In other words, your notes could help you recall what arose for you as you actively read and considered the material. Think of these summaries (and the optional notes) as your own personal record of what you've read/viewed across the semester. If you do a decent job of them throughout the semester, they will likely be useful in writing analytical papers and invaluable at the end of the semester as you write your final essay.

To get points for your summaries, they must be posted on BB by midnight on the night before the relevant class discussion. Please note that summaries are worth 150 points toward your final grade. Because we won't know how many sources there are in total until after students have assigned materials, I cannot say exactly how many points each summary will be worth. Thus, throughout the semester, if you do not submit a summary on time you will get a score of 0 for that summary; if you submit a thorough and well written summary, you will get a score of 1 (or some fraction of that if I

need to alert you to the fact that your summaries are falling short of expectations and, therefore, less likely to be useful to you in writing papers). At the end of the semester your earned points will be multiplied by whatever factor is necessary to arrive at a score out of 150 (probably between 3 and 4).

**Analytical Papers:** These papers **should not be a summary** of the reading, but should instead be your **deep reflections** on the reading. You might find it useful to review the critical thinking questions in the previous section of the syllabus as you think about your approach to each analytical paper. In each paper you should incorporate multiple sources and tackle ideas and issues that cut across numerous readings. Each paper should provide a thoughtful analysis of the material for a given section of the course. You should be engaging in critical thinking about each of the sources and making connections across, or important distinctions between, different sources. You may find it helpful to think of these papers as the opening for a conversation with your peers and with me. How can you bring your own voice to your work in a way that invites others into a conversation about your thoughts regarding the course material? Write about your thoughts, ideas, and analyses of what you've been reading and viewing. Explore questions that the readings have raised for you and try to answer those questions. These papers should be good preparation for writing the final essay.

Each analytical paper should be about 3 double-spaced pages in length (with standard margins and font). Analytical papers must be submitted on BB by the due date (as seen on BB and in the syllabus). **Points will be lost if papers are turned in after the deadline.**

**Final Essay:** There will also be a final essay exam for the class. This will be a take-home exam that requires you to use **at least 75%** of the course readings/materials, including all material assigned by students. You will receive two prompts from which to choose as the basis for your essay. A hard copy of your final essay (4½ to 5 pages) will be due during final exam week. ***You will find it extremely helpful to take notes on the readings and discussion throughout the semester so that you will be better prepared for the final essay.*** It is recommended that this be done at the end of your summaries, but it can also be done in a separate electronic or paper document.

## Grades

Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

	<u>Points</u>
Summaries	150
Analytical papers: 2 best (of 3), 100 points each	200
Participation	250
Selecting material and facilitating class discussion	150
Final essay exam	<u>250</u>
	1000

A standard grading scale will be used to calculate your final grades:

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
93 - 100	A	80 – 82	B-	68 – 69	D+
90 - 92	A-	78 – 79	C+	60 – 67	D
88 - 89	B+	73 – 77	C	below 60	F
83 - 87	B	70 – 72	C-		

## Classroom policies

This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies>.

I expect that you will demonstrate respect for one another during class. Differences of opinion are welcome, but please make sure to express them in a civil and respectful way. Out of consideration for everyone who is part of this class, please do everything in your power to arrive at class on time. Also, please do not begin packing up to go until it's clear that we are done for the day. If you bring your cell phone to class, please make sure it is **turned off** before class begins. **Under no circumstances should laptops, tablets, or phones be used during class.** Leaving the room to use your phone would also negatively affect your participation grade.

Any sources on which you base your ideas should be **cited in the text of your papers** for this class. For both analytical papers and the final essay, it is necessary to cite and supply references for all materials used. It is not necessary to use any additional sources beyond those required for the class but, if you choose to do so, you must appropriately cite and include a reference for these sources as well. **For all assignments in this class, if you use a direct quote, you must use quotation marks and cite the source.** Academic integrity is fundamental to a liberal education and is a basic responsibility of each student. All forms of academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating and plagiarism) are unacceptable and will result in serious repercussions.

### Responding to the Changing COVID Landscape

Two important things we can currently do to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill and transmitting the virus is to be fully vaccinated and wear a mask. Grand Valley staff, students and faculty are required to be vaccinated, unless they have received exemption status. We are also required to wear face masks indoors at this time. You can find answers to questions regarding COVID and Grand Valley's policies on the Lakers Together website. As noted on the website:

Face coverings must cover the mouth and nose, and fit snugly against the sides of the face. A face covering is defined as having two layers of tightly woven, washable and breathable fabric: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

Students who are not able to wear a face covering due to a medical condition should [contact Disability Support Services \(DSR\)](#) to discuss their individual situation.

Regarding our course specifically, this syllabus describes the ideal situation of a normal semester in which we can hold in-person classes and in which social distancing is not a necessary part of our daily lives. However, as we all know from our ongoing experience with this virus, the COVID landscape is unpredictable and in flux. It may be the case that we will need to alter our plans somewhat due to COVID, particularly if a new variant becomes increasingly problematic or there is a major surge. Should it be necessary to shift to an online format, this course is designed to continue functioning with as little disruption as possible. In that case, we would continue to meet for discussions using Discussion Board, Zoom meetings, or some combination of the two. Whatever comes our way, we will adjust accordingly.

One thing we have all learned from the COVID experience is that we are resilient and able to respond to change in ways that would have once seemed impossible. As we know from past

semesters, we can all do what needs to be done to minimize the chance of being infected and spreading the virus. Rest assured that I will have our collective health and safety in mind throughout the semester and that we will be able to respond effectively together to whatever this semester brings.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Week of:

### January 10: Introduction to Capstone

#### T Introduction to the class (no reading)

TH Lucas, R. E. (2007). Personality and the pursuit of happiness. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1, 168-182.

### January 17:

T Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: Revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, 61, 305-314.

T Inglehart, R., Foa, R., Peterson, C., & Welzel (2008). Development, freedom, and rising happiness: A global perspective (1981-2007). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 264-285.

TH Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855.

TH O'Connor, T. (1995). Therapy for a dying planet. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind* (pp. 149-155). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

### January 24:

T Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995, May). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.

T Waldinger, R. (2015). What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness. [https://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_waldinger\\_what\\_makes\\_a\\_good\\_life\\_lessons\\_from\\_the\\_longest\\_study\\_on\\_happiness?referrer=playlist-what\\_makes\\_you\\_happy#t-120878](https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?referrer=playlist-what_makes_you_happy#t-120878)

TH Leonhardt, D. (2020, June 1). The Minnesota paradox. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/briefing/minneapolis-coronavirus-tara-reader-your-monday-briefing.html?smid=em-share> (This link will bring you to several articles in the New York Times, but the one you need to read is the first one, *The Minnesota Paradox*. Pay special attention to the chart that shows median incomes in various U.S. cities.)

TH Orchard, J., & Price, J. (2017). County-level racial prejudice and the black-white gap in infant health outcomes. *Social Science and Medicine*, 181, 191-198.

TH Taylor, C. J. (2019). Health consequences of laws and public policies that target, or protect, marginalized populations. *Sociology Compass*, 14, 1-13.

### January 31: First analytical paper due by midnight, Wednesday, February 2 (covering material through January 27. Course material due by midnight Sunday, February 6.

T Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. (chapters 1-4)



TH Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. (chapters 5-9)

**February 7: Material selections must be turned in via e-mail by midnight Sunday, February 6  
CHECK YOUR E-MAIL REGULARLY FOR THE FOLLOWING WEEK.**

T Vedantam, S. (Host). (2021, July 5). You, But Better. [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Hidden Brain*. Hidden Brain Media. <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/you-but-better>.

T Forster, E. M. (1909). *The Machine Stops*. England: The Oxford and Cambridge Review.

TH O'Brien, C. (2008). Sustainable happiness: How happiness studies can lead to a sustainable future. *Canadian Psychology* (49)4:289-295. Doi: 10.1037/a0013235

TH Frantz, C. M., & Mayer, F. S. (2009). The emergency of climate change: Why are we failing to take action? *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 9, 205-222.

TH O'Tuama, P. (Host). (2021, November 26). Linda Hogan: Song for the Turtles of the Gulf [Audio podcast episode]. In *Poetry Unbound*. On Being. <https://onbeing.org/programs/linda-hogan-song-for-the-turtles-of-the-gulf/>

**February 14:**

T Belic, R., Director (2011). *Happy* (Motion Picture). United States: Wadi Rum Productions. (to be viewed before class; available streaming via Tubi)

TH Student-led discussions; reading TBA

**February 21:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA; **Second analytical paper due by midnight, Wednesday, February 23 (covering material from February 1 through February 17)**

T

TH

**February 28:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

T

TH

**March 7: No class (Spring Break); withdraw with "W" deadline March 11**

**March 14:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

T

TH

**March 21:** Student-led discussions; reading TBA

T

**TH**

**March 28: Third analytical paper due by midnight, Wednesday, March 30 (covering material from February 22 through March 24)**

**T** General discussion

**TH** Solnit, R. (2009a). *A paradise built in hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster*. Viking Penguin, New York. (pp. 1 – 70)

**April 4:**

**T** Solnit, R. (2009b). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 73 – 132)

**TH** Solnit, R. (2009c). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 135 – 180)

**April 11:**

**T** Solnit, R. (2009d). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 183 – 227)

**TH** Solnit, R. (2009e). *A paradise built in hell* (pp. 231 – 313)

**April 18: Instructions for final essay provided on BB by Monday**

**T** General discussion and questions about final exam

**TH** Wrapping up the course

**FINAL ESSAY DUE TUESDAY, APRIL 26, BY 5:00 PM**